United Nations A/55/123–E/2000/89

General Assembly
Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
11 July 2000

Original: English

General Assembly
Fifty-fifth session
Item 20 (b) of the provisional agenda*
Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: special economic assistance to individual countries or regions

Economic and Social Council
Substantive session of 2000
New York, 5 July-1 August 2000
Agenda item 5
Special economic, humanitarian and disaster relief assistance

Assistance to Mozambique following the devastating floods

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report has been prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 54/96 L of 10 March 2000, by which the Secretary-General was requested to report to the Assembly at its fifty-fifth session, through the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of 2000, on strengthening the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations and on the collaborative efforts of the specialized agencies and other bodies of the United Nations system for mobilizing and coordinating humanitarian assistance and assistance required for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the infrastructure, in Mozambique, with a view to supporting the efforts of the Government of Mozambique.

2. The devastating floods in February and March 2000 in southern Mozambique triggered a massive outpouring of international support. Affected were the provinces of Maputo, Gaza, Inhambane, Sofala and Manica, as well as Maputo City. An estimated 544,000 persons were displaced and 5 million affected. In addition, 699 were reported to have perished. The United Nations system played a vital role in stimulating, mobilizing and coordinating the assistance that was provided to Mozambique. The present report discusses the United Nations role in support of national efforts to respond to the disastrous floods.

3. Beginning in December 1999, heavy rains fell over Mozambique, reaching unprecedented levels by the end of the month. In early February 2000, the Umbeluzi, Incomati and Limpopo Rivers exceeded all known records and, on 25 February, when the river floods caused by Cyclone Eline reached Mozambique, the central and southern provinces of the country experienced the most extensive floods in more than 50 years.

4. The emergency hit a country which is among the 10 poorest of the world, with a poverty index of 70 per cent. It affected 12.1 per cent of the population, that is, 2.04 million people in five provinces; more than 700,000 of them required assistance. Among these, 500,000 were displaced by the floods and temporarily sheltered in over 100 camps set up by the Government.

* A/55/150.

00-53131 (E) 140800

The impact of the floods on all sectors of the economy has been enormous: 10 per cent of the cultivated land was destroyed, while 90 per cent of the irrigation structure in the affected areas was damaged. More than 600 primary schools were either destroyed or severely damaged, as were health posts and hospitals. The World Bank estimates that direct losses amount to US $273 million, while lost production amounts to $247 million.

5. Despite its very limited means, the Government of Mozambique responded in a remarkable way to the emergency. Within the National Institute for Disaster Management (INGC), the operational arm of the Government in cases of emergencies, a coordination structure was set up with support from the United Nations system. Regular coordination meetings were organized by INGC and presided over by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with the participation of government ministries, United Nations agencies, donors and non-governmental organizations. INGC also organized regular press briefings and sectoral planning meetings.

6. Immediately following the second floods, on 28 February, the Secretary-General appointed Ross Mountain as his Special Humanitarian Envoy for Mozambique. Mr. Mountain arrived in Maputo on 1 March and spent two weeks working with the Government of Mozambique and the United Nations Resident Coordinator and United Nations country team in addressing the response to the disaster.

7. The Resident Coordinator and the United Nations country team, with reinforcements from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat and agency headquarters, worked in partnership with and in support of INGC and relevant line agencies. The World Food Programme (WFP) played a key role, coordinating relief logistics in the joint logistics cell established in INGC, in addition to food assistance. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) worked with their government counterpart ministries in the water, sanitation, health, shelter and education sectors.

8. At the request of the Government and the Resident Coordinator, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs fielded a United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team immediately in response to the 12 February floods, and a prolonged UNDAC presence throughout the month of March in response to the second wave of floods. The teams were integral parts of the official coordination structure, supporting and assisting INGC and providing a relief coordination database. Several members of the teams were stationed in Beira to ensure an information link between ongoing operations and the capital. The coordination between civil international staff and military personnel from seven countries became a particularly important task of the UNDAC teams, who also coordinated an impressive number of military assets (at one stage, nearly 60 helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft). Their services during the acute phase of the emergency were inestimable: overall, some 50,000 people were rescued. On 26 April, experts from both sides evaluated the collaboration and integration of military staff in a civilian structure throughout the period of the presence of the military assets, and unanimously considered it an exemplary success.

9. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs/UNDAC teams were also instrumental in preparing two major emergency appeals: on 23 February, the Government and the United Nations entities appealed for some $60 million for 300,000 flood victims. The impact of Cyclone Eline drastically increased those requirements, and $130 million was contributed by donors to the relief phase.

10. On 22 March, the Government and the United Nations entities launched a transitional appeal, seeking $100 million of additional emergency assistance for the benefit of more than 600,000 flood victims until the next agricultural season in September. That appeal was the result of an intensive collaborative effort between line ministries, United Nations entities — UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, WFP, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, (FAO), UNESCO, WHO and major non-governmental organizations. Its overall objective was to fill the gap between the short-term emergency relief required by the returning flood victims until rehabilitation projects could be designed, funded and implemented.

11. The International Conference on the Reconstruction of Mozambique, organized by UNDP with the Government of Mozambique in Rome on 3 and 4 May, succeeded in obtaining pledges of $453 million for the reconstruction. Donors were urged to

meet the outstanding resource requirements of that appeal in order to pave the way for the reconstruction efforts decided by the Conference.

12. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs will continue to provide staffing support to INGC and to assist the Government and the United Nations Resident Coordinator with the coordination and monitoring tasks until the end of the transitional phase, in September 2000. This also includes NGO liaison officers, a field presence in Beira, and support to UNDP and FAO to coordinate the shelter, resettlement and agriculture components of the appeal, respectively.

Context

13. Mozambique is one of the poorest countries in the world, with a human development index of 0.340 and a ranking of 169 out of the 174 countries surveyed in the 1999 Human Development Report prepared by UNDP. The country has received substantial international support since the completion of the peace process in December 1994, with annual pledges during the Consultative Group meetings averaging between $800 million and $1 billion. Multi-party elections in 1994 and 1999 won high praise from international observers, as well as from national observers, who participated in the last exercise, as evidence of the country's commitment to consolidating democracy. Economic growth since 1996 has been dramatic, ranging from 7 to 12 per cent per year, and the country seemed well on the way to recovery and development when disaster struck in the form of the unprecedented floods and their dramatic impact.

14. The coastline is more than 2,500 kilometres long, and Mozambique has nine river systems, which mainly rise in neighbouring countries. There is an October-March rainy season, and cyclones and floods are normal annual occurrences. Drought is also common, and Mozambique is sufficiently large that in some years there are droughts in some parts of the country and floods in others. In peacetime Mozambique, the Government turned its attention to putting in place a strong management system to control the country's vulnerability to natural disasters entailing the creation of a new oversight institution, the National Institute for Disaster Management (*Instituto Nacional de Gestão de Calamidades*), and the development of a national disaster mitigation policy.

15. The United Nations system has been a consistent partner to Mozambique throughout its various encounters with natural disasters, as occurred during this particular calamity. In reviewing the role of the United Nations in the context of these floods and their aftermath, the following points seem to emerge as salient to the coordination process, and contributed to mitigating the fallout on the affected populations:

(a) The Government led the response process, while United Nations actions were directed at supporting those efforts;

(b) Efforts by the United Nations and the Government built on earlier training, experience and preparation, activities that had earlier been supported by United Nations entities such as UNICEF, UNDP and WFP;

(c) The United Nations system mobilized resources quickly when a member State faced a disaster that was beyond its immediate ability to handle;

(d) The United Nations system established a disaster management team in Maputo comprising the country management team and technical focal points from each agency, while substantial numbers of extra staff were mobilized on short notice;

(e) International military forces allowed themselves to be coordinated by civilians and the United Nations in an unprecedented way;

(f) The Secretary-General appointed his first-ever special humanitarian envoy for a natural disaster.

II. Floods disaster of 2000

A. National capacity for emergency response

16. Since its independence in 1975, Mozambique and its partners in the international community have acquired substantial experience in dealing with the complex emergency in which the country found itself as a result of the 16 years of internal civil unrest, during which a number of natural and man-made disasters also struck. Response capacity improved with experience, and this was bolstered by the Government's decision, in the late 1990s, to strengthen the national institutional capacity to manage the impact of such occurrences.

17. The predecessor disaster planning and management unit was restructured and a new institute, INGC, was established under the continuing responsibility of the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation. Both INGC and the first national disaster management policy were formally approved in June 1999. Among the United Nations entities, the country management team had reached consensus on designating WFP as the lead United Nations agency in Mozambique for disaster management. In that capacity, WFP had worked closely with the Government and other partners towards the preparation of the INGC statutes and the new policy document. One of the first actions of INGC was the establishment of a technical commission, with representatives from 10 ministries, in which, exceptionally WFP was invited to participate.

18. During 1999, INGC held two national workshops and a variety of training and simulation exercises, with the direct involvement of WFP and with support from UNDP. Particularly important was the involvement in this training of the fire brigade, the police and representatives of civil society, notably, the boy scouts, the Red Cross and a number of religious organizations, all of which subsequently made important contributions in the national response to the floods of 2000.

19. The relief operations linked to the floods in Inhambane Province in February 1999 had also been important for gaining experience. Indeed, INGC produced a calendar for 2000 with photographs of damage caused by the Inhambane floods, and distributed it to local leaders in flood-prone areas as a form of visual warning of the potential power of floods. UNICEF and WFP were the main United Nations bodies that had participated in those relief activities.

20. In terms of regional cooperation, the South African Air Force had provided helicopters for use in Mozambique during the 1996, 1997 and 1999 floods, building in the process good links with INGC, and gaining valuable experience of flying in Mozambique. South African military helicopters had also been used to transport people and material in the Mozambique elections in December 1999. It was not surprising, therefore, that South Africa became the first to provide air support during the floods of 2000.

21. As part of its regular cooperation programme with Mozambique, the Vulnerability Assessment Unit of WFP, which includes ministries, non-governmental organizations and FAO, had identified the 20 districts most vulnerable to food insecurity. As part of its Food Fund Development programme, WFP trained food aid monitors and the district authorities, began food-for-work projects and set up emergency food reserves. Some of the districts were in the flood area, and the food reserves, and the food aid monitors, were used effectively in the floods. WFP had also positioned a contingency reserve of 150 tons of food in Vilanculos, Inhambane Province, and this was used in the river Save relief operation in that Province and in neighbouring Sofala.

22. FAO has over the past eight years established within the Ministry of Agriculture an early warning system that monitors agricultural conditions. Early warning staff were used to estimate the amount of agricultural land affected by flooding and the need for seed for future seasons.

B. Early warning

23. From September 1999, INGC, the National Meteorological Institute and the Southern African Regional Climate Outlook Forum began to warn of early weather forecasts indicating an unusually heavy rainy season. In the September-December period, there were a number of front-page articles in the local press repeating that warning. In November 1999, there was a meeting for the Press and the international community to launch the INGC contingency plan for 1999-2000. That meeting was presided over by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, who was accompanied by the United Nations Resident Coordinator. In November, the Ministry of Health instructed its provincial directorates to prepare for possible floods. Contingency stocks of medicines and implementation plans for staff response were developed.

C. The floods

24. Heavy rains began early, disrupting the national elections, which were held from 3 to 5 December 1999, in several parts of the country. In northern and central Mozambique, the rainfall in October-December 1999 was below normal, but in the south it was high — 70 per cent above normal in Maputo and 25 per cent above normal in Xai Xai, Gaza Province. There were heavy rains in southern Mozambique and in neighbouring

South Africa and Swaziland in January, causing early but not otherwise abnormal flooding. There were flood crests on the Umbeluzi, Incomati and Limpopo Rivers between 17 and 23 January and some people were displaced. INGC mobilization teams in the area warned people of the likelihood of further flooding.

25. During the first week of February, the rains continued to be unusually heavy in southern Mozambique and began to cause some alarm. Within that period, southern and central Mozambique were hit by Cyclone Connie from 4 to 7 February. At Maputo international airport, rainfall on 6 February was a record 328 millimetres, and over the four-day period had reached 454 mm. There was substantial local damage, with houses washed away and roads damaged. An estimated 6,000 people were displaced and many more affected. The road linking Maputo City to the provincial capital city of Matola was cut and the road from Maputo and Matola to South Africa was also under water and impassable.

26. Cyclone Connie, moving very slowly across southern Mozambique and into Swaziland, South Africa, southern Zimbabwe and even Botswana, dropped record rainfalls. This caused new floods on the rivers into Mozambique. On 7 February the Incomati River was higher than it had ever been, and measuring equipment at the South African border was washed away. By 9 February, flooding on the Incomati had closed the main road (EN1) between Maputo and Xai Xai. The Incomati and Umbeluzi Rivers reached levels not seen since 1937. The town of Sabie (population 9,000) was evacuated and thousands of other people in rural areas were forced to move to high ground.

27. By 12 February, there was serious flooding in the Limpopo valley, especially in the cities of Chókwè (where flood waters reached the historic high level of 1977) and Xai Xai. Further north, flooding on the rivers Save and Buzi in central Mozambique displaced thousands of people. At that point, it was estimated that 100,000 people had been displaced and another 200,000 affected by the flooding.

28. Five South African helicopters and a similar number of fixed-wing aircraft arrived on 11 February. In the next nine days, they succeeded in rescuing 2,800 people. Four boats from the Mozambican navy rescued another 6,358 persons between 29 January and 23 February.

29. During the following 10 days, the Limpopo River remained high, but other rivers began to fall and people had started to return to their homes. However, by 17 February there were forecasts of another cyclone, Eline, which finally hit central Mozambique on 22 February (virtually destroying the town of Nova Mambone at the mouth of the river Save).

30. As Cyclone Eline moved inland, it caused heavy rain in central Mozambique, Zimbabwe and northern South Africa. The rain fell on already saturated ground and ran off quickly. The four INGC/UNDAC daily situation reports from 21to 24 February all warned of further Limpopo flooding; the 21 February report warned that increased floods may have a devastating impact. The Gaza provincial government began to evacuate its offices in the low part of Xai Xai, and prisoners were moved from the local jail.

31. An unprecedented flood crest moved down the Limpopo River from 25 to 27 February. By 1 March, flood waters in Xai Xai were 3 metres above the previously recorded high level. Similar flood crests moved down the Save and Buzi Rivers.

32. Flooding was at previously unknown levels, inundating areas that people normally treated as safe high ground. The Limpopo, at its widest point, was 60 km wide, flooding areas that had never been under water. People in the Limpopo, Save and Buzi River valleys were forced to take refuge in trees and on the roofs of buildings.

33. The flood surge down the Limpopo River on Saturday, 26 February, with water rising by 1.5 metres in four hours, and the rapid rise in water in the Save and Buzi Rivers, dramatically changed the picture. Rescue flights resumed on 27 February, and by 6 March, South African helicopters had rescued a further 11,591 people, Malawian helicopters saved 1,873, and other helicopters another 287. Mozambican military and Red Cross boats (many operated by military out of uniform) rescued a further 11,254 people. Several thousand more were rescued by fishermen and other individuals with small boats. Some people spent up to 10 days on roofs and in trees. Dramatic television pictures of people being saved, including the birth of baby Rosita while her mother was still stranded in a tree, were shown all over the world.

34. By the second week of March, most aircraft and a large number of boats had arrived, and the highly publicized rescue operation was nearing completion.

Yet, the continuing need for relief remained high. Nearly 550,000 people had been made homeless and were in more than 100 different and often inaccessible locations; many were in refugee camps, and at least three accommodation centres had populations between 30,000 and 60,000 each. Still other people were stranded in small groups on isolated areas of high ground. The need for food, shelter, water, improved sanitation, and health care was massive; however, virtually all roads and rail lines in the affected areas were closed, with bridges down or roads washed out or still flooded. There was no road link to the north bank of the Limpopo (Xai Xai and Chibuto) and all transport was by air or small boats trying to cross the flooded and fast-flowing river. Xai Xai airport remained closed, and an informal air traffic control and logistics coordination system was established at the Chibuto grass landing strip; dozens of planes landed daily and three daily commercial flights were established between Maputo and Chibuto. Further north, helicopters were taking food from a British Navy ship off the coast and dropping it to isolated groups of people along the Save River. Even this massive collective air force was overstretched, and there was some hunger in accommodation centres and isolated areas. Overall, the relief effort was effective, as few people died of hunger or disease, and most have now returned to their places of origin.

35. By late March, most of the aircraft had left and water levels had fallen in most areas. However, there had been heavy rains in mid-March, in part from tropical storm Gloria, and the Save and Buzi Rivers remained over flood level until late March. The Limpopo River remained above flood level until the end of April, closing some roads and continuing to prevent people from returning home. Several thousand people tried to return home in the third week of March, only to be forced out again when water levels rose again. People slowly returned home, but in mid-March, 300,000 remained displaced, most in accommodation centres, and it was only in mid-April that there was a sudden move home by large numbers of people. People returned to Chókwè on the south bank of the Limpopo even though the clean-up there had not been completed. By the end of May, some low-lying areas were still flooded, several thousand people were still homeless, and a few accommodation centres remained open. Furthermore, many people who had returned home required continued help and some could only be supplied by air. Some airlifts continued until the end of May, and no permanent road link to the north bank of the Limpopo and Xai Xai had been reopened by the end of May.

36. The floods displaced 544,000 people and caused at least 699 deaths, according to government figures. Despite the steady build-up and advance warnings, the floods were far worse than anyone expected, predicted or had experienced. In Chókwè, for example, the city government, health services, the management of the local irrigation system, the Red Cross, and WFP all had to evacuate their offices in great haste, leaving behind stocks and records, as water rose faster and higher than anyone thought possible. INGC, in its "worst case" scenario in its November 1999 plan, had predicted that up to 93,000 people might be displaced in Gaza Province; the actual number for Gaza Province alone was more than 250,000.

III. Coordination of humanitarian assistance

A. Response by the Government and United Nations partners

37. With increasing appreciation of the scale of the potentially growing disaster, the technical commission of INGC started meeting more regularly in mid-January and relief efforts began with the initial population displacement in late January. South Africa made a formal offer of air force helicopters in January, if Mozambique agreed to pay for the fuel. The first situation report on the Mozambique floods was prepared by WFP and issued by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs on 26 January. Joint INGC/WFP missions visited some affected areas, and WFP was asked for food aid for people already displaced. A joint INGC/donor/ government/United Nations evaluation mission was planned for 7 February, but this was overtaken by events.

38. The exceptional rains in Maputo on 6 February triggered the first large response. On that day, the Foreign Minister began what were to be daily afternoon meetings in his office with the Prime Minister and three other ministers to coordinate the government response to the floods. The INGC technical commission, joined by the Red Cross and UNDP, met on 7 February. An initial report and appeal for funds was issued by the Government on 10 February.

39. On 8 February, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs telephoned the Maputo Resident Coordinator's office to offer the assistance of an UNDAC team. After discussions with INGC and the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, this was accepted by the Government and a formal invitation was issued on 10 February. An UNDAC team of five people (the first of what were eventually to be three teams) arrived on Saturday and Sunday, 12 and 13 February, and met with United Nations officials on Sunday. Its initial instructions were to assist with launching a United Nations inter-agency appeal, as well as to prepare reports and information for donors and to help to coordinate international assistance. With assistance from the Emergency Response Division of UNDP, a coordination centre was set up in INGC, with equipment and staff.

40. Normally, UNDAC teams work from United Nations offices, and WFP, the lead United Nations agency on disaster management in Mozambique, had already prepared office space and computers for the team. This was used for the first day. But in an unusual move, the Resident Coordinator decided that the team should be in the INGC office, and the move took place on 15 February. The UNDAC team then received support from the Resident Coordinator's office and from the UNDP emergency fund. One member of the team commented: "We always work in support of the United Nations Coordinator, but the way we were able to work quickly with the Government was quite unprecedented".

41. UNICEF and WFP diverted human and financial resources and supplies from existing stocks to help flood victims. UNICEF supported government and non-governmental organizations to begin repairs of water pipes and provided water bladders for refugees housed in schools and communities with no access to potable water. UNICEF and WFP began to coordinate some donors meetings, and helped organize assessment flights on 11 and 12 February. UNICEF also put three experts into the Ministry of Health and the Maputo provincial directorate of health. On 16 February a flight from Italy brought in 40 tons of medical supplies from UNICEF and high-protein biscuits from WFP.

42. WFP began to effectively coordinate food relief and this was clearly expected by other donors. WFP also began moving most of its own food to Palmeira (70 km north of Maputo City), the northern-most point at which the road was passable and where there was warehouse space and maize milling capacity; planes and helicopters were able to land on the road to take food further north. Helicopters were also carrying food south from Maputo. The small airport at Xai Xai was flooded, and planes began to use the grass landing strip at nearby Chibuto.

43. UNDP and the office of the United Nations Resident Coordinator quickly organized computers, cellular telephones, cars and so on, and by 16 February, the UNDAC team was fully operational inside INGC. During the week, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs organized a relief flight carrying supplies from its warehouse in Pisa, in response to the government appeal of 10 February.

44. The UNDAC team stressed the importance of open meetings to bring together government, donors and operational agencies. The first of what were to become daily INGC/UNDAC briefing and coordination meetings took place on 17 February. These were open to all, and government representatives from the sectoral working groups reported on their activities.

45. The aircraft fleet slowly expanded, with three more aircraft (one hired by WFP) and an additional helicopter in operation by 20 February. On 22 February, two Malawi military helicopters started to fly from Beira in the centre of Mozambique and two UNICEF-hired passenger helicopters from Maputo.

46. By this time, however, the road to South Africa was already open and donor interest was beginning to wane. The United Nations system played an important role in keeping donors interested.

47. Following the establishment of improved systems in INGC and the launch on 23 February of the first international appeal on emergency relief and rehabilitation, the UNDAC team left on 24 February. With their departure, INGC took over running the daily briefing and coordination meetings.

48. On 29 February, the Secretary-General named the Director of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs at Geneva as his Special Humanitarian Envoy to Mozambique for the floods, and he arrived in the country the next day. His appointment made clear to both the Government of Mozambique and donors the high degree of seriousness accorded by the United Nations system to the unfolding floods situation. The Special Humanitarian Envoy made significant and successful efforts in Mozambique

to mobilize international support for flood relief. He was important in encouraging bilateral donors and non-governmental organizations to get involved and to participate in INGC coordination. One United Nations official in Maputo commented: "His rank was really important. People want to meet a special envoy of the Secretary-General and this made people more anxious to join his team". His high rank was similarly important in encouraging the military to join the established coordination process.

49. The importance the United Nations gave to the disaster was backed up by a statement made by the President of the Security Council on 6 March and a resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 10 March (54/96) calling for the Secretary-General to continue "mobilizing and coordinating" humanitarian assistance and support for reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts. There were also three high-level visits to Mozambique by senior United Nations officials — the Executive Director of UNICEF, the Deputy Director of WFP and an Under-Secretary-General — all of which were used to beneficial ends in contacts with the Government and donors in calling attention to the need for continued support to the emergency.

50. During the two weeks he was in Mozambique, the Special Humanitarian Envoy was the senior United Nations official and he presided over the special disaster management team. His rank enabled the Special Humanitarian Envoy to take decisions in collaboration with the United Nations agencies on the ground, and this added urgency and flexibility into the United Nations system in Maputo.

51. UNDAC teams are intended to be rapid response teams mainly for "sudden onset natural disasters"; they normally arrive quickly and stay for only two weeks. The presence of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Mozambique was unusual not only because it was working within INGC, but also because of the second and then a third team, which arrived on 10 March. UNDAC had originally not planned to send a third team, but it was requested by the United Nations Resident Coordinator, in part at the request of donors who felt that the presence of the UNDAC teams ensured smoother operation of the relief effort. The third team also helped set up databases, prepare a new appeal, and build up the Beira INGC. But the third team was probably more important as a reassurance to the rapidly growing donor community than for any concrete actions. The importance of the United Nations system in mediating between donors and the Government and in ensuring that bilateral and private donors feel more informed should not be underestimated.

B. Coordinating United Nations assistance

52. The United Nations system in Mozambique was one of the first to go through the United Nations Development Assistance Framework exercise as part of the Secretary-General's reform programme. The evolving experience in, and commitment to, working together served the system well during the most difficult days of the floods period. It is notable how often it is commented that in that crisis the United Nations system acted more like a team and less like a set of individual agencies. It was therefore operationally significant that the link with INGC was the Resident Coordinator's office, and not a specific United Nations entity such as UNDP or WFP.

53. Within the context of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework, a country management team had been created and a United Nations Resident Coordinator's office established. The country management team was quickly used as the basis of a disaster management team, which also included the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the sectoral focal points. The Resident Coordinator's office supported the teams sent by Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. A Web site had been created in 1999 for the United Nations in Mozambique, and this quickly became a main site for flood information and was, at the peak, updated several times a day; in March 2000, 3,448 people from 58 countries visited the Web site.

54. The United Nations mobilized more than 200 extra people at the peak of the relief effort. As well as UNDAC, most United Nations agencies brought in experts and additional people from offices abroad, while United Nations Volunteers were transferred from other activities inside Mozambique to support flood relief efforts. Local staff were hired both by United Nations agencies and to support INGC, and there were many local volunteers.

55. For the purpose of coordinating relief efforts, sector working groups were created to deal with activities relating to food supply, health and nutrition,

water and sanitation, shelter, accommodation centres and non-food relief items, education and agriculture. At the request of UNDP, a mine action working group was established and reports from the group were then included in the regular INGC briefing meetings. The sector working groups contained government, United Nations and bilateral agencies and non-governmental organizations and met frequently, some meeting every day during the following months, and were used for coordination and to sort out technical problems. The two operational agencies, WFP and UNICEF, played the largest role on the ground.

1. Food supplies

56. From 11 February to 29 May, WFP distributed 12,000 tons of foodstuffs, mostly maize, but also beans, oil, sugar, salt and high-energy biscuits, to 590,000 beneficiaries located at 259 different sites in five provinces. WFP also organized kitchen sets for 20,000 families. To ensure geographic coverage, a total of five outposts were opened. Of the total food delivered, 33 per cent was moved by air transport. Fifteen non-governmental organizations, both local and international, have ensured food distribution to the main camps. Local authorities have also played a critical role in food deliveries in isolated areas. WFP food monitors and social mobilizers have been key to ensuring beneficiary registration, enhancing the role of women, conducting monitoring and field assessments, and developing recovery plans through food for work and supplementary feeding. In addition to food aid coordination and operations, WFP provided technical staff and tools to map vulnerable areas to determine the number of affected persons and hectares lost to flood damage.

2. Water and sanitation

57. UNICEF provided coordination and resource support to the government and local and international non-governmental organizations in ensuring access to safe water, hygiene and sanitation in the accommodation centres. To reduce vulnerability to cholera and diarrhoeal diseases, UNICEF organized animators and drama groups to perform in camps and accommodation centres to teach people about sanitation and hygiene in crowded conditions. It purchased and distributed 44,000 sets of buckets and soap so that people could wash their hands. It also distributed 352,000 packets of water purification powder (containing a flocculent to clear the mud and chlorine to purify the water). Government and non-governmental organizations also distributed 500,000 UNICEF oral rehydration salt sachets. The impact was shown by the fact that cholera and diarrhoeal diseases were effectively controlled in accommodation centres.

58. UNICEF also helped with rehabilitating water and sanitation systems in two damaged cities, Chókwè and Xai Xai. UNICEF worked closely with national and international non-governmental organizations and, in the clean-up of Chókwè, with the Mozambican military; in those two cities, UNICEF provided basic tools such as 1,500 shovels, 600 wheelbarrows and 3,000 heavy-duty rubber gloves. In Chókwè, the road to the rubbish dump was repaired and reopened.

3. Health and education

59. Malaria became a serious problem among displaced people because of the flooding and proliferation of mosquito breeding sites, coupled with a reduction in immunity levels in displaced populations caused by inadequate nutrition and increased stress. To slow the increase in malaria cases, WHO and UNICEF provided technical support and supplies for intensified malaria-control activities, including spraying, health education and the distribution of insecticide-treated bed nets and malaria drugs.

60. Support in the form of vaccines, autodestruct needles and syringes, cold chain equipment, transportation and technical assistance was provided by UNICEF to the Ministry of Health to carry out an emergency vaccination campaign against measles, meningitis and neonatal tetanus among displaced communities. UNFPA worked to provide young pregnant women with medications and services, in and out of accommodations centres, to support maternal care.

61. WHO brought in a team to help the Ministry of Health with its planning for the crisis, conducted rapid needs assessments, and worked on malaria, health education and mental health plans. WHO also supplied cholera drugs, emergency kits of drugs, communications equipment, and play equipment for children.

62. The Government stressed the importance of children returning to school as quickly as possible. UNICEF and UNESCO, having agreed to work together, assisted with a rapid needs assessment.

UNICEF procured learning and teaching materials for 670 schools and 200,000 primary schoolchildren affected by the floods, and provided basic cleaning materials for 1,300 classrooms affected by flood waters. Fifty large tents were flown in from Kosovo to provide temporary classrooms.

63. To support work in Gaza Province, UNICEF opted to deploy four technicians to the Gaza provincial government health, public works and education directorates, respectively, as opposed to setting up a sub-office in Xai Xai.

4. Agriculture

64. FAO provided technical assistance to the programme to conduct initial agricultural production assessments and supply seeds and tools to people returning home. FAO brought in a number of specialists to work with the Ministry of Agriculture to conduct assessments, formulated a database of non-governmental organization distribution plans (ensuring the communication of that information), organized seed coordination, and completed agricultural production forecasts. On 6 March, FAO fielded an emergency coordinator to technically assist the emergency group of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development to ensure a coordinated emergency intervention for the agricultural sector in flooded districts.

5. Shelter, accommodation centres and non-food relief items

65. UNDP supported the Government in its coordination function on shelter and acted as the focal point for the shelter working group. The group brought together representatives from the Government, national and international non-governmental organizations, donors, and other United Nations agencies. The working group became a forum for discussions on strategic aspects of the resettlement process. Guidelines for resettlement were developed, which were issues jointly prepared by the Government and the United Nations. A senior staff member in the country office was designated to lead the group, while UNDP funded the recruitment of local and international personnel to support the work of the group and INGC was supported directly to establish a database on accommodation centres and non-food relief items. UNDP also acted as a channel for donor funding for selected activities in support of community and public building rehabilitation.

66. In mid-March, the World Bank fielded a team of 20 people to do a damage assessment and look at reconstruction, and in April, approved $30 million in balance-of-payments support and reallocated $2.5 million in quick dispersing funds for road repair.

67. Even agencies without representation in Maputo contributed. The United Nations Environment Programme, the International Labour Organization and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) sent teams to Mozambique to work with the Government in assessing the impact of the floods and designing plans for reconstruction.

6. Mine action

68. A major development problem for Mozambique is the challenge of liberating the country from the estimated 700,000 to 900,000 landmines and unexploded ordnance strewn throughout the country. Of the provinces affected by the floods, Maputo and Inhambane are considered heavily mined, while parts of Gaza, Manica and Sofala Provinces are also mined. Despite a sustained increase in donor funding for mine clearance activities, only a relatively small percentage of the total land area mined has been cleared. A level one survey to provide a definitive assessment of the landmine situation will be completed in 2001. In the meantime, concerns grew that the flood waters might result in the movement of undiscovered mines, with the potential for endangering the lives of aid workers and persons returning home. Accordingly, and in order to ensure an immediate and concerted response to assess the implications that the floods could have for mine action, and to facilitate the efficient use of existing and new resources, UNDP assisted the National Demining Institute (IND) to put in place an emergency response mechanism. A mine action emergency group was formed comprising IND, representatives of the main mine clearance operators (Handicap International, Norwegian People's Aid and the UNDP-supported Accelerated Demining Programme) and interested donors. The group developed a 10-point action plan and approved the designation of priorities and use of resources. As a result, it was possible to complete aerial and on-the-ground surveys of flooded areas, and mine education for aid workers and persons in accommodation centres in known mined localities. UNICEF, as the designated United Nations agency for mine education, allocated funds to Handicap International for completing activities in this area. A

comprehensive assessment to determine the number of dislodged mines will be completed under the auspices of the umbrella project developed by the working group for the management of flood-related mine action. UNDP also worked with IND in the preparation of the issues paper on mine action, which was included in the conference document that the Government presented at the International Conference on Reconstruction, which was held in Rome in May.

7. Air operations

69. With United Nations agencies and up to 100 non-governmental organizations and 2,500 foreign personnel working in the field and up to 56 aircraft in the air, the need for coordination was clear. A Joint Logistics Operation Centre (JLOC) began operation in INGC on 3 March. JLOC was headed by WFP on behalf of the United Nations system but it was clearly part of INGC and the government coordination system. Any agency that wanted material or people flown the next day had to present a request to JLOC by 1300 hours, when it held a meeting to set priorities. The priority shipping list was taken to Maputo airport where a meeting of all operators (mostly military) took place at 1500 hours. That meeting was presided over by WFP, and operators portioned out the list of supplies and people to be transported. A similar arrangement was established in Beira, with UNDAC support, to serve the Buzi and Save areas. The military forces agreed to be coordinated by the United Nations because it was seen as neutral.

70. According to UNDAC and to military officials, this was an unprecedented arrangement in a flood disaster. The use of JLOC was a lesson learned from complex emergencies that usually involve military actions, and this was its first use in a natural disaster. Also exceptionally in a natural disaster, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs sent someone from its Military and Civil Defence Unit to Maputo to help to coordinate the use of military assets; in the past (for example during Hurricane Mitch in Central America in 1998), such a liaison person had remained in Geneva.

71. The various air forces cooperated and accepted tasking instructions from civilians. By 26 May, 9,615 hours had been flown (5,398 by military aircraft), carrying 11,789 tons of cargo and 13,911 passengers — in addition to rescue and reconnaissance.

C. Coordinating with donor partners and appeals for funding

72. On Saturday, 26 February, with embassies in Maputo and the United Nations alert to the developing crisis, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation asked the United Nations to convene an urgent consultative meeting of donor multilateral partners in the INGC offices on Sunday morning, 27 February, which he presided over. He also moved his daily 8 a.m. ministerial meeting to the INGC office, before moving on to chair daily 11 a.m. open INGC meetings.

73. The international response to the new, 26 February, flood was extremely positive. There was huge international fund-raising and volunteers and non-governmental organizations poured in. Eleven different air forces provided aircraft, in addition to those hired privately. At the peak, there were 56 aircraft in operation and more than 1,000 foreign military personnel in Mozambique. There were also more than 200 boats donated or lent to Mozambique.

74. The first week after the new floods was chaotic, with resources flowing in at an unprecedented level. In that difficult period, much of the coordination was done by United Nations staff working behind the scenes. For example, a WFP staff member, working at Maputo airport attempted, with a cellular telephone, to control the logistics for the rapidly expanding relief effort. The United Nations country team itself discovered that it had limited senior staff experienced in disaster management, and that there were no United Nations contingency or preparedness plans. However, the experience of agency heads working together on the country management team made it easier for them to respond jointly to the natural disaster.

75. By Monday, 6 March, enhanced coordination with all partners was needed as attendance at the daily coordination meeting had swelled, and from 6 March the meetings were presided over by the Foreign Minister. The daily meetings served to inform people about the progress of the relief effort and of the most pressing needs. A new Joint Logistics Operations Centre was opened within INGC on 3 March.

76. The Government issued its initial information document and an appeal for US$ 2.7 million for emergency relief supplies on 10 February. Based on that appeal, on 11 February, WFP and UNICEF both issued agency appeals.

77. The response, however, was limited, and 10 days later WFP and UNICEF had received only $1.4 million; WFP was concerned that it could not pay the continued costs of keeping South African planes and helicopters flying. In Maputo, there is criticism from both government and United Nations officials about the slowness of donors to respond, while at least one major donor has complained that the United Nations system did not say loudly enough that there was a need for more funding for helicopters and that the message did not get through to its capital.

78. The formal letter from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to the Government on 11 February stated that the Office could assist the Government with launching the United Nations inter-agency appeal, and that was seen as a major part of its task in Mozambique. The Government of Mozambique had traditionally produced government-led or joint appeals, and assumed that would happen again, while the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs assumed that its position was set out in its letter. As progress was made towards a 23 February appeal to donors, those assumptions led to some misunderstandings as the first draft was entitled "United Nations inter-agency appeal for emergency relief and initial rehabilitation". It called for contributions to be made to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs or a United Nations agency and said money channelled to the Office would be spent in coordination with the relevant United Nations system agencies. After consultation with the Government, however, the final version was entitled "International appeal of the Government of Mozambique for emergency relief and initial rehabilitation in collaboration with the United Nations agencies" and called for contributions to be made to INGC or the Red Cross, through bilateral means, or to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and also stated that money channelled through the Office would be spent in coordination with the Government and the relevant United Nations system agencies.

79. The most important obstacle facing the Government and the UNDAC/Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs team occurred because the team felt it could include assistance for relief and initial rehabilitation, which would be channelled through the United Nations system. The Government expressed its desire that even initial rehabilitation required repairs of the breaks in the roads, for which there was no partner United Nations agency, and wanted to include this in the appeal. The final document was a composite, with the first three pages being the "Government of Mozambique international appeal" for US$ 65 million, of which $44.3 million was for infrastructure, $8.1 million for other government requests, and $13.6 million for United Nations system assistance. Most of the rest of the document detailed those requests for which there was a partner United Nations agency.

80. By 1 March, just days after the bigger flood, $17 million had been pledged. On 6 March, WFP issued a new appeal. By 20 March, total pledges to government and United Nations agencies had exceeded $100 million, although not all of this was delivered.

81. Meanwhile, the third team fielded by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs included two people sent to draft an updated donor appeal, taking into account that the floods had become much worse since the 23 February appeal and that people would need to be helped at least through August.

82. By this time, the Government had accepted the invitation of the Government of Italy to host an international conference on reconstruction, initially proposed for April, but held on 3 and 4 May. In the meantime, it had become clear that further assistance was required for the emergency phase of the floods response. Nonetheless, the Government was concerned that a third international appeal for emergency aid in addition to the upcoming Consultative Group meeting could be confusing to potential donors. When it was decided to launch the updated international appeal for emergency relief and rehabilitation, the Government agreed on the condition that United Nations and government assessed needs were equally represented. The 22 March appeal had the same title as the 24 February appeal, but its form was different. The appeal was for $100 million above that already pledged, and included in the body of the report both government and United Nations projects. As well as including government requests for the rehabilitation of roads and buildings, it also included a much larger request for agricultural support, reflecting the government view that there was a need to act quickly to help farmers return to production. On 22 March, UNICEF issued its own agency appeal.

D. Coordinating with non-governmental partners

83. Overall, the INGC coordination mechanism and the daily meetings worked to help coordinate the activities of non-governmental organizations. When international non-governmental organizations and other donors arrived unannounced or without local contacts, they were simply sent to INGC and invited to the briefing meetings, which served to integrate their activities and geographic coverage. The Ministry of Health required that all non-governmental organizations carrying out health activities be registered. Indeed, one of the most useful aspects of integrating the UNDAC teams into INGC was that there was no alternative coordination point.

84. In an effort to improve non-governmental organization coordination, the United Nations Special Envoy met with a local non-governmental organization consortium and the national Red Cross to devise ways for enhanced collaboration. Those efforts resulted in the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs funding additional non-governmental organization liaison officers in Maputo and Beira to act as the focal points for non-governmental organization coordination, working alongside both the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and INGC. While most non-governmental organizations were meeting with INGC and trying to coordinate efforts, there were some problems with those non-governmental organizations that refused to participate in a coordinated fashion.

E. Coordinating with the Press

85. Unquestionably, the extensive press coverage of the floods was instrumental in generating the large response. The United Nations system played a central role in keeping the flood on the world's television screens.

86. The first television teams in Maputo were BBC and SABC in early February, and they were assisted by WFP and UNICEF. BBC was in Chókwè at the time of the 26 February flood. Later, journalists and television crews from ITN, CNN and many other agencies also came to Mozambique. The now-famous rescue footage on television was particularly important in drawing international attention to the flood. WFP and UNICEF committed a significant amount of staff time to the television crews and also helped to ensure that they had space on helicopters. From mid-February to mid-April, WFP had five additional press people in Maputo, UNDP had one headquarters-deployed communications officer, while other agencies used in-country information staff. This was productive and successful, although it created some tension with other United Nations agencies.

87. When the Secretary-General's Special Humanitarian Envoy arrived, he was accompanied by a press officer. He was available for interviews, and statements from a special envoy of the Secretary-General carry more weight than those from other United Nations officials. The availability of the Resident Coordinator for press briefings and interviews (BBC, CNN and others), as well as the heads of United Nations specialized agencies such as WHO and UNESCO, was also important for keeping the media informed.

88. In the first week after the 26 February floods, with the chaos at the airport, journalists had to negotiate with individual pilots to obtain space on aircraft. But with the operation of JLOC from 3 March, this too was more coordinated. The United Nations system and JLOC gave high priority to ensuring that the press had seats on planes and helicopters.

89. Journalists were able to fly in from South Africa, stay at a hotel in Maputo, get out to the flood sites during the day and return to Maputo at night. The United Nations facilitation of the media's work, the availability of its senior staff for briefings and interviews and its ability to generate new information kept this story on the front pages and on the television screens. There is no doubt that the huge media coverage triggered the massive support for Mozambique.

F. Reconstruction

90. The Government of Mozambique appealed for $449.5 million at the International Reconstruction Conference held in Rome on 3 and 4 May. The United Nations system played a different role than it had in earlier appeals. The Government of Mozambique accepted the offer and asked the United Nations system in Maputo to support the conference. UNDP was invited to act as the secretariat for the conference. Locally, the UNDP office was reinforced with staff

provided by the Emergency Response Division with resources mobilized by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland Department for International Development and from Headquarters to strengthen the country office at that time. Together, the United Nations Resident Coordinator's office and the expanded country office team were instrumental in working with government representatives in putting in place the arrangements for the Rome Conference. Representatives from United Nations agencies worked with their national counterparts to compile data and develop the activities that were eventually included in the reconstruction document that was presented in Rome. The World Bank fielded a technical team, which worked to prepare the first comprehensive damage assessment. Those reports were made available in draft form to the United Nations disaster management team, which included a World Bank representative. The findings of the report were subsequently updated by the Government and integrated into the Rome Conference document. In contrast to the two international emergency and rehabilitation appeals, the Government took the lead in the preparation of the Conference document. It established a special drafting committee, under the leadership of the former Minister of Planning and Finance and the current Minister for Transport and Communications, drawing on the United Nations system reports and the World Bank assessment, substantiated by its own subsequent and updated information.

91. UNDP was designated conference secretariat and a team was established with members from UNDP, including Emergency Response Division staff and consultants, the Resident Coordinator's office, and the Government. They designed and organized the conference, with inputs from UNDP headquarters, and with final decisions being made by the Mozambican Council of Ministers. The United Nations Office for Project Services in Rome, at the specific request of the UNDP Administrator, was contracted to organize hotel and travel arrangements for the Mozambican delegation. All other logistics arrangements were covered by UNDP, through the senior adviser, for the organization of round tables and donor conferences based in Geneva, and decisions were taken by a joint United Nations-government pre-conference team based in the Mozambican Embassy in Rome. The entire United Nations country team went to Rome in support of the conference and together finalized the United Nations country team's intervention presented at the conference by the Resident Coordinator.

92. In the end, the Rome meeting was a joint Mozambique-United Nations conference co-chaired by the Foreign Minister of Mozambique and the UNDP Administrator, with a government reconstruction programme document. The conference was successful, with pledges totalling an estimated $452.9 million, slightly in excess of the amount indicated in the conference document.

G. Ongoing assistance

93. The television crews and most of the displaced persons have gone home, most of the water has drained away, but United Nations involvement has not ended. The United Nations has played and continues to play four important roles.

94. First, was the United Nations role in helping to prepare the Rome Conference, which ensured that Mozambique would have sufficient resources for the daunting reconstruction programme.

95. The second role was the expressed desire to learn lessons from the flood and the response to it, and the need to develop a local United Nations disaster plan. There will be a special evaluation and a lessons learned seminar in Maputo in July.

96. Third is the need to continue to support people who have been affected by the flood. In the two southern provinces of Maputo and Gaza, 70 per cent of the cropped land was lost to floods. Perhaps 10 per cent of Mozambique's agricultural production has been lost for this year, and some farmers will take two or even three years to recover. This means that some farmers will continue to need food aid for up to a year, and WFP needs another $5 million to provide that assistance. WFP is making arrangements with non-governmental organizations to carry out food distribution and food-for-work projects. Further support is also needed for seeds and tools, of which 100,000 kits have already been distributed to peasant farmers returning home, some of this through the Italian-funded UNDP-assisted project with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. WHO is developing cholera and malaria control plans. UNICEF is continuing to support the Government to re-establish health services, schools, access to potable water and sanitation, and community-based nutrition information

systems. UNESCO continues to work with the Ministry of Education to place the issue of emergency preparation and response more centrally in its planning activities. A UNESCO educational architect is at the disposal of the Ministry as part of its technical assistance package offered by its Director-General. UNESCO will also work with the Ministry in ensuring an emergency component of the proposed education broadcasting capability. In addition, a large-scale programme for the rehabilitation of public sector offices and buildings is under way, with funding being channelled through UNDP by the United Kingdom Department for International Development. An important aspect of the United Nations role is to ensure that donors do not forget Mozambique, now that the flood waters have receded.

97. Fourthly, the United Nations agencies will play a role in improving disaster management and mitigation and in reducing vulnerability. All of the United Nations agencies in Mozambique will be involved in strengthening INGC, meteorology and other early warning systems; in improving mapping and risk assessment; in resettling people away from flood-prone areas and reducing vulnerability; in other projects such as food for work to improve flood defences; and in reconstruction. The specialized agencies, which had a lower profile during the relief effort, will be particularly important.

IV. Preliminary conclusions

98. The Mozambique floods of February and March 2000 were unusual both in the way they evolved and in the huge international response to them. Early in the crisis the United Nations was important in generating support from the donor community. But when the crisis became very serious and highly publicized, the United Nations was asked by the Government to help coordinate an almost overwhelming outpouring of international support. Now that the floods may be forgotten outside Mozambique, the United Nations again returns to the position of mobilizing support.

99. In this process, a number of unusual features of United Nations system involvement and partnership can be noted:

(a) Reinforcing the central role of the Government in disaster management, and not creating parallel or alternative systems. The main work of the United Nations system was behind the scenes, but its presence and activities increased the confidence both of the Government and of the donor community;

(b) The naming of a special envoy of the Secretary-General, which raised the profile of the disaster at a key time;

(c) The similar importance of having someone as senior and popular as the Foreign Minister taking hands-on responsibility for disaster management;

(d) The extended role of UNDAC;

(e) The effectiveness of the United Nations system reform and the office of the Resident Coordinator;

(f) The ability to build on past programmes for disaster management and mitigation and the ability of United Nations agencies to integrate emergency responses into the regular programming structures and operations;

(g) The willingness of military forces to be coordinated by civilians supported by the United Nations.

100. Mozambique already had a disaster management system and an operating tradition into which the United Nations system could feed. But this disaster was of a magnitude far beyond anything with which the Government could reasonably have expected to cope. The United Nations system showed it could mobilize support quickly and yet was able to work with and through the Government. While lessons learned will provide the Government and the United Nations with valuable information for better preparedness, response and improved coordination mechanisms in the future, the unusually strong Government/United Nations partnership will be embraced in future initiatives, most notably the United Nations Development Assistance Framework for Mozambique for the period 2002-2006.

Annex

Mozambique floods, 2000: chronology of events

1999	
November	INGC contingency plan for 1999/00 rainy season launched
2000	
17-23 January	Flood crests on Umbeluzi, Incomati and Limpopo Rivers in southern Mozambique
26 January	First situation report of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs on the Mozambique floods, prepared by WFP
4-7 February	Cyclone Connie hits central and southern Mozambique and then moves on to drop record rainfall over Swaziland, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Botswana
6 February	328 mm of rain is recorded at Maputo international airport
	First daily meeting is chaired by Mozambique Foreign Minister with other government ministers to coordinate government response to the floods
7 February	Incomati River reaches all-time high
	Roads between Maputo and Matola and onwards to South Africa and Swaziland are cut
8 February	The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs offers a United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination team
9 February	Floods on the Incomati cut the main national highway (EN1) between Maputo and Xai Xai. Umbeluzi River floods
10 February	The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs offer of a UNDAC team formally accepted by the Government of Mozambique
	Government report on the floods and appeal for US$ 2.7 million is issued
11 February	Arrival of first South African aircraft (5 helicopters and 5 fixed-wing aircraft)
	WFP and UNICEF issue appeals
12 February	Limpopo River floods, inundating cities of Chókwè and Xai Xai
	Save and Buzi Rivers in the centre of Mozambique flood
	UNDAC team of five arrives in Maputo
13 February	UNDAC team meets with Government and United Nations

15 February	UNDAC team moves to offices within INGC
16 February	UNDAC team fully operational, with computers and cellular telephones provided by UNDP
17 February	First daily INGC/UNDAC briefing and coordination meeting, open to all
19 February	French military C160 arrives in Maputo to join the airlift operations
21 February	Gaza provincial government evacuates offices in lower part of Xai Xai
21-24 February	INGC/UNDAC daily situation reports warn of fresh Limpopo floods
22 February	Cyclone Eline hits central Mozambique before moving inland over Zimbabwe and northern South Africa
	Two Malawian helicopters arrive in Beira to operate in the Save valley
23 February	Launch of an international appeal of the Government of Mozambique for emergency relief and initial rehabilitation, in collaboration with the United Nations
24 February	UNDAC team leaves Mozambique
25-27 February	Flood crests on Limpopo River; fresh floods on Save and Buzi Rivers
26 February	French military C160 leaves Maputo
27 February	Mozambique Foreign Minister presides over urgent meeting with United Nations and donors in INGC offices
28 February	Daily ministers meeting moved to INGC offices
29 February	Second UNDAC team arrives in Maputo
	Director of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs named Special Humanitarian Envoy of the Secretary-General
1 March	Flood water in Xai Xai 3 m higher than previous record
2 March	Special Humanitarian Envoy of the Secretary-General arrives in Maputo
	Six French military helicopters arrive in Maputo to join airlift operations
3 March	French military C160 arrives in Maputo to join airlift operations
	Belgian military C130 arrives in Maputo to join airlift operations

	Joint Logistics Coordination Centre opens within INGC to coordinate the air assets of foreign air forces, one non-governmental organization and commercial charters
6 March	Mozambique's Foreign Minister takes over chair of daily briefings in INGC
	British Royal Air Force helicopters arrive (4 Puma in Maputo, 4 Sea King in Beira) for relief operations
	Statement by the President of the Security Council
	WFP issues a second appeal
7 March	German military contingent arrives (2 C160s in Maputo, 4 helicopters in Beira)
8 March	French military helicopters leave Maputo to go to Madagascar, also affected by flooding
9 March	United States military contingent arrives (3 C130s and 3 helicopters in Maputo, 4 helicopters in Beira)
10 March	The General Assembly, in resolution 54/96 L, calls on the Secretary-General to continue mobilizing and coordinating humanitarian assistance and support for reconstruction
	Third UNDAC team arrives in Maputo
12 March	Spanish military contingent arrives (3 helicopters in Maputo)
	Belgian military C130 leaves Maputo
	French military C160 leaves Maputo
20 March	Portuguese military contingent arrives (1 C130 in Maputo)
	British military contingent leaves
22 March	Updated international appeal issued for $100 million
	UNICEF issues a second appeal
27 March	United States military contingent leaves
29 March	German military contingent leaves
31 March	Third UNDAC team leaves Maputo
2 April	Spanish military contingent leaves
3 April	Portuguese military contingent leaves
3-4 May	Rome Conference on post-flood reconstruction receives pledges in excess of the amount requested

United Nations A/55/124–E/2000/90

General Assembly
Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
12 July 2000
English
Original: French

General Assembly
Fifty-fifth session
Item 20 (b) of the provisional agenda*
Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: special economic assistance to individual countries or regions

Economic and Social Council
Substantive session of 2000
Item 5 of the agenda**
Special economic, humanitarian and disaster relief assistance

Assistance to Madagascar following the tropical cyclones

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. Madagascar was struck by tropical cyclone Eline, which crossed the island from the east-central to the south-western region, and tropical storm Gloria, which made landfall on the north-eastern coast of the island; both disasters occurred within a three-week period in February 2000. These two disturbances affected 34 districts of the west-central, central, north-eastern and south-eastern regions of Madagascar, causing the death of 222 people and leaving 184,831 persons in need of immediate humanitarian assistance and 22,985 people homeless.

2. Four weeks later, in March, the very severe tropical cyclone Hudah (with winds gusting up to more than 300 km/h) made landfall on the north-eastern coast (the town of Antalaha) and left by the north-west. It struck with rare intensity the districts of Antalaha, Maroantsetra and Andapa, which had already been battered by tropical storm Gloria.

3. These natural disasters crossed the island with strong winds, torrential flood-producing rains and landslides. The successive onslaught of these three cataclysms caused significant material damage to the agricultural, health, educational and public infrastructures, as well as loss of human life.

4. The three cataclysms combined caused 222 deaths, affected 1,106,208 people (including 221,242 children under five years of age and 12,445 pregnant women) and left 295,613 persons in need of immediate assistance (including 59,123 children under five years of age and 3,326 pregnant women).

5. In-depth sectoral evaluations are being carried out in order to assess the damage caused by the three natural disasters, which will significantly diminish prospects for economic development and have a negative impact on the nutritional status of the affected regions, particularly in the east-central and north-eastern regions. Other central regions and western and south-eastern regions were also affected, but the economic and social consequences in those regions are less severe than in the more vulnerable north-eastern and east-central regions.

* A/55/150.
** E/2000/100.

00-52807S (E)

II. Impact of the three disasters

Impact on economic conditions and food security in the affected areas

6. Severe flooding and landslides have damaged large areas of rice paddies and will have an adverse effect on the agricultural year in most of the affected regions and on future harvests of rice, a staple food in these regions. The rehabilitation of agricultural water systems will be a long-term task.

7. Moreover, the disasters have had devastating effects on cash crops (vanilla, cloves), and the impact on the cash income of households in the affected regions and for the national economy will be felt in a few months (higher food prices, decreased exports and insufficient cash income for the population).

8. Food shortages will have serious consequences for the nutritional status of the population, particularly of the categories at risk. At the same time, there will be an explosion in food prices and a shortfall in income from food.

9. The destruction of communications infrastructures by landslides and heavy flooding (impassable roads, washed-out bridges, silted rice paddies) negatively affect development conditions in isolated regions, which are experiencing serious economic difficulties.

Impact on availability of basic social services

10. Several health units have been destroyed and will no longer be operational unless an emergency rehabilitation programme is rapidly put in place to ensure minimum services and combat diseases (recurrence of diarrhoeal diseases, malaria, measles, acute respiratory infections) and malnutrition which are exacerbated by the isolation of certain areas and the unavailability of immediate medical assistance (destruction of stocks of drugs) and the pollution of water sources (wells, surface water and unsafe and affected rivers). In the north-east, at least 86 per cent of the health units are no longer operational. The state of health of the most vulnerable sectors of the population (children, the elderly, pregnant women, displaced populations) is extremely precarious.

11. Many school buildings have also been destroyed and thousands of schoolchildren are facing the real risk of not being able to complete the school year, since the resumption of classes is in doubt. In the districts of Andapa, Antalaha and Maroantsetra, school buildings have been seriously damaged. For example, at Maroantsetra, only seven out of 124 schools are still operational. Pending the rehabilitation of school buildings, an emergency system to enable teaching to be resumed through the provision of teaching materials and the use of tents as provisional buildings is currently in operation.

12. With respect to public buildings that have been destroyed, a long-term emergency rehabilitation programme will be required in order to restore efficiently operating services.

Structural constraints and difficulties facing intervention in the affected regions

13. The two most seriously affected regions are in isolated areas and are not accessible from the capital, Antananarivo. In the north-east, only 28 per cent of the *fokontany* (villages) surveyed are accessible by road, 46 per cent are accessible only by helicopter, 3 per cent by aircraft and 42 per cent by boat or canoe except where the coasts are blocked by trees (as in the case of the port of Antalaha). Furthermore, the main difficulty currently facing the badly affected north-east region is lack of access by road and the need to deploy aircraft on a large scale to reach the intervention areas, and the lack of telephone communications, particularly in Maroantsetra. In the east-central region, the districts of Marolambo and Antanambao-Manampotsy have so far been accessible only by air. Such geographical conditions make the logistics of intervention very difficult and costly.

III. Response by agencies of the United Nations system, the Government and donors

(a) Response by United Nations agencies

14. The response by United Nations agencies is in keeping with the measures taken each time there is a cyclone. The United Nations system has played a catalytic role in the coordination and mobilization of responses to requests for emergency assistance, both within and outside the United Nations system.

15. A working group of the United Nations system (the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP),

the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)) headed by the Resident Coordinator has drawn up a three-prong intervention strategy: immediate emergency response to assist victims, a short-term response and a joint mechanism for responding to emergencies in general.

Immediate response strategy

16. In order to harmonize emergency interventions (food and non-food assistance, water purification equipment, medical kits), the concept of "one single logistical support" has consistently underpinned such activities owing to the logistical constraints prevailing in isolated and disaster-stricken regions. Logistical resources have accordingly been concentrated and placed under the management of WFP in order to meet both the logistical needs of United Nations agencies and also those of other partners (Médecins sans frontières, CARE, the Red Cross and others).

17. After cyclone Hudah struck, and in view of the scale of requirements and the remoteness of the disaster-stricken areas, two operational intervention and coordination centres were set up to facilitate and expedite emergency measures in the north-east zone (United Nations operational and logistics centres, one based in Antalaha and the other in Maroantsetra). Each centre is coordinated on the basis of the "lead agency" concept. In Antalaha, the Resident Coordinator designated WFP as the lead agency for United Nations interventions while in Maroantsetra that role is played by UNICEF in coordination with the other partners in the sector and the Government (the National Relief Council (CNS), regional relief bodies and local authorities).

18. In this emergency phase, overall coordination remains under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator, who prepared the flash appeal from United Nations agencies following cyclone Hudah. The flash appeal, totalling US$ 15,794,339, was disseminated through the information channel of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs with a view to mobilizing resources.

19. Even before cyclone Hudah, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs had already sent a member of its natural disaster response service, following the damage caused by Eline and Gloria, in order to assist the Resident Coordinator in his efforts to mobilize international assistance, and seven situation reports on the disaster were prepared and distributed.

20. In view of the tremendous impact of cyclone Hudah, a team of three members of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, including an information specialist, was sent to Tananarivo and to the Antalaha region. Their functions were to assist the office of the Resident Coordinator by collecting information on the impact of the cyclone and to mobilize resources through the preparation of an emergency flash appeal to the international community. Through its information network, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs distributed five situation reports. The Office's Military and Civil Defence Unit launched an appeal to its partners to mobilize resources for the transport by air of assistance to regions that were otherwise inaccessible.

21. By way of immediate response, each agency took action in accordance with its mandate:

(a) WFP:

(i) Emergency food aid totalling about US$ 200,000;

(ii) Special operations (logistics) totalling US$ 1,200,000;

(iii) Emergency operations in the form of vector control technology (VCT) totalling US$ 2,932,487;

(b) UNICEF: Emergency assistance (medical kits, high-protein biscuits, water purification, blankets and so forth) totalling in all some US$ 3,000,000;

(c) UNFPA: Provision of emergency reproductive health kits and support for the in-depth evaluation of reproductive health needs and requirements for the rehabilitation/reconstruction of health units in the north-east zone (Antalaha, Sambava) to an overall total of US$ 70,000;

(d) WHO: Evaluation of the state of preparedness of health services to deal with post-cyclone epidemics by WHO/West Africa (AFRO) team using the expertise of a sanitary engineer and an epidemiologist in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, and emergency assistance (medical kits and drugs totalling US$ 97,000);

(e) ILO: Support for the Government in evaluating damage in the south-eastern and east-central zones;

(f) FAO:

(i) Evaluation of damage to the agricultural sector and identification of emergency agricultural needs as well as the provision of seeds (120 tons of rice seed, 90 tons of bean seeds and 400 kilograms of vegetable seed) and small items of equipment (spades, shovels, wheelbarrows);

(ii) For the rice-growing region of lake Alaotra, which experienced a period of drought, the provision of 150 tons of rice seed through a technical cooperation project totalling US$ 127,500;

(g) UNDP/ERD (Emergency Response Division):

(i) Financial support for the conduct of initial in-depth evaluations and support for the operations of CNS in the interest of better coordination — US$ 150,000;

(ii) Logistical support from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs totalling US$ 98,500.

Short-term strategic responses

22. In addition to specific assistance measures, the United Nations has also supported the in-depth evaluation phase and assisted the National Relief Council through the strengthening of its emergency response capacity. To that end, the Resident Coordinator has mobilized all the technical and human resources available within the United Nations system to support the damage-assessment phase in the health, water and sanitation, education, nutrition and agriculture sectors, as well as the process of drafting a strategic document on a medium-term response during the rehabilitation phase.

23. A joint WFP/FAO mission backed by the Government (Ministry of Agriculture) was undertaken from 25 April to 12 May 2000 in order to evaluate the crop year and food balance-sheet following the various climatic phenomena (floods, drought, cyclones) that have struck the country. The recommendations of that mission will be incorporated into the implementation of the short- and medium-term responses.

Medium- and long-term strategic responses

Medium-term

24. The United Nations is also involved in the medium-term response (3 to 12 months). This includes assistance to the Government in the formulation of a medium-term rehabilitation plan for the affected areas through the compilation and analysis of in-depth sectoral studies.

25. The United Nations agencies support the definition of a framework for medium-term action based on technical commissions established in cooperation with the Government: health/water and sanitation; agriculture/food security; productive infrastructures and communications; logistics.

Long-term

26. The long-term support mechanism is based on institutional support provided by UNDP with a view to preparing national institutions to deal with emergency situations arising from natural disasters. Such assistance should lead to the formulation of a national strategy for the prevention and management of natural disasters and risks, and the definition of a sustainable institutional management framework.

27. In this context, UNDP has made available to CNS five national consultants and an international consultant responsible for guiding the process.

28. Following the emergency assistance phase, the two operational coordination centres based in Antalaha and Maroantsetra will be able to be mobilized at short notice in the other areas and used for preventive action in preparation for the 2001 cyclone season.

(b) Government response

29. The Government launched two appeals (9 March and 7 April) for international solidarity to respond to the emergencies caused by the three natural disasters. Based on in-depth evaluation carried out by CNS, the first appeal generated US$ 3.5 million and the second, US$ 15,608,121. The United Nations flash appeal is based on the appeal launched by the Government following cyclone Hudah.

30. Owing to the geographical distances between the affected areas, the extent of the material damage and human casualties and communication difficulties, the

three cyclones have greatly hampered the Government's efforts to respond to the disasters.

31. During the critical emergency phase, the Government relied on CNS, which has cooperated actively with the regional relief bodies to speed up emergency relief operations and coordinate the flow of aid and the work of the technical teams.

32. The army has also been involved in facilitating emergency relief efforts and has provided valuable support to CNS and the regional relief bodies. Nevertheless, the human and technical input provided by the Government has not constituted an effective response to emergency needs owing to logistical difficulties and inadequate resources for responding to such a critical situation.

33. The reconstruction phase has begun, and the National Council for the Coordination of Cyclone Damage (CNC)) has taken over from the National Relief Council. CNC acts as an intermediary between the Government and the donors participating in the reconstruction effort.

34. The mission to assess the cyclone damage, which was undertaken in May, has been completed. The estimated cost of the reconstruction programme and emergency response is US$ 102 million, and the Government's needs for budgetary financing are expected to amount to US$ 51 million.

(c) Response of the financial and technical partners

35. The financial partners (bilateral and multilateral agencies, embassies) and technical partners (non-governmental and international organizations) have been involved from the outset through consultations and exchanges spearheaded by the *Comité restreint d'intervention en cas de catastophes* (CRIC). This forum for consultations has throughout the crisis phase played a very important role in coordinating relief measures and aid flows from the various partners in their efforts to respond rapidly to meet assistance needs.

36. The international community responded very rapidly during the emergency assistance phase, when agencies of the United Nations system made a substantial contribution to the greater coherence of relief efforts.

37. The financial partners have relied heavily on the data collected by the CRIC (joint aerial inspections, daily CNS/CRIC coordination meetings) to plan their emergency assistance, and have channelled their financing directly to the work carried out by United Nations agencies (WFP, UNICEF) in order to facilitate aid flows:

(a) Through WFP:

(i) United States Agency for International Development (UNAID): financing of three helicopters through WFP;

(ii) Canada: resources for logistical support;

(iii) United Kingdom: resources for logistical support;

(iv) Switzerland: provision of a logistics specialist and, if necessary, funds for the purchase of food;

(b) Through UNICEF:

(i) United Kingdom: non-food donations;

(ii) Norway: non-food donations, medical kits;

(c) Through WHO:

(i) Italy: US$ 150,000 donation for the rehabilitation of health infrastructure;

(ii) Botswana: emergency aid amounting to US$ 3,000 (Lactate Ringer + oral rehydration salts).

38. Some donors (France, Germany, United States of America, the European Union) have chosen to provide direct support or support through technical and specialized partners (CARE International, Médecins sans frontières, regional relief bodies).

39. With regard to medium-term damage-rehabilitation efforts, the Government, donors and technical partners have jointly participated in a broad assessment of damages and rehabilitation needs. The Government will submit this document to donors with a view to obtaining financial support. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has agreed in principle to provide special resources financing in the amount of US$ 24 million. The Paris Club is currently considering a request for the postponement of the US$ 14 million debt and will reach a decision on the matter by the end of December 2000.

IV. Prospects for rapid and durable reconstruction

40. The reconstruction phase is coordinated by CNC. The analysis and interpretation of the studies carried out by the sectoral commissions (agriculture, health, water and sanitation, infrastructures, transport) resulted in the assessment of damages and an evaluation of the rehabilitation needs in each sector concerned.

41. In the agricultural sector, an initial FAO mission (April 2000) made it possible to carry out a rapid assessment of damages and to plan short- and medium-term emergency measures through a US$ 400,000 Tropical Cyclone Programme (TCP) project. That was followed by a more complex FAO/WFP mission, which evaluated losses in the agricultural production of subsistence crops and export crops, particularly vanilla and cloves, and the food deficit caused by the cataclysms. The purpose of this mission is to help the Government to determine food shortages, requirements in the form of food aid and imports to overcome the shortages and the need for seeds to save the agricultural year currently in progress.

42. This mission included in its evaluation disasters (particularly drought and hail) other than the cyclone. The mission stressed the serious economic impact of the combination of three cyclones and drought (southern and east-central regions) on prospects for rice production (region of lake Alaotra) and the nutrition gap of the affected populations that would occur. The drought in the country's southern regions also calls for urgent measures in the area of stockpiling, nutritional follow-up and strengthening food-security systems in addition to the short-term rehabilitation needs of the zones affected by the cyclones.

43. At the same time, the World Bank has undertaken an assessment of the damage to the infrastructures (agricultural, sanitation, educational and administrative), employing the same methodology that was used in the case of Mozambique. This exercise includes the work of the sectoral commissions that have been involved since the beginning and will result in the preparation of a document on assistance for the rehabilitation of the cyclone damage and support for the balance of payments, which should be finalized by the end of May. The results of these two missions shall have to be collated.

44. The support of UNDP/ERD for the preparation of the medium-term rehabilitation plan is an integral part of this process.

45. All these missions are carried out with a view to giving the Government and the international community the information they need to take decisions concerning the emergency measures to be carried out. Such information is of vital importance to the financial partners, who rely on the results of the whole evaluation process, which should result in the formulation of a single plan for financing the rehabilitation needs of the infrastructures in the most affected sectors, such as agriculture, transport, education and health.

United Nations A/55/125–E/2000/91

General Assembly
Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
18 July 2000

Original: English

General Assembly
Fifty-fifth session
Item 20 (b) of the provisional agenda*
Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: special economic assistance to individual countries or regions

Economic and Social Council
Substantive session of 2000
New York, 5 July-1 August 2000
Agenda item 5
Special economic, humanitarian and disaster relief assistance

International assistance for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Nicaragua: aftermath of the war and natural disaster

Report of the Secretary-General

Contents

		Paragraphs	Page
I.	Introduction	1	3
II.	Political background	2–9	3
III.	Consolidation of democracy	10–22	4
	A. Human rights	10–13	4
	B. Solution of property conflicts	14–15	4
	C. Strengthening of the rule of law	16–22	5
	1. Modernization of forensic medicine	18	5
	2. Support to the security forces	19–20	5
	3. Prison reform	21–22	5
IV.	Demobilization, reintegration and reconstruction of municipalities	23–29	6
	A. Landmines	23–27	6
	B. Productive reintegration of ex-combatants	28	6

* A/55/150.

00-53804 (E) 140800

C. Reintegration of Nicaraguans in exile 29 6
V. Natural disaster prevention and management 30–43 7
VI. Decentralization and local development 44–54 9
VII. Population, women's rights and sexual and reproductive health 55–57 11
VIII. Environmental management 58–62 11

I. Introduction

1. The General Assembly, in its resolution 53/1 D of 16 November 1998, encouraged the Government of Nicaragua to support the development of medium- and long-term national programmes and strategies, in particular those related to poverty alleviation, economic and social development and the resolution of problems related to property, with a view to the consolidation of a stable democracy. The General Assembly also stressed the need for the international community to continue its cooperation with Nicaragua with a view to the effective promotion of its economic growth and development, the conservation of its natural resources and the strengthening of its democracy.

II. Political background

2. The second quarter of 1998 was characterized by the Consultative Group meeting for Nicaragua, which was held in Geneva on 1 and 2 April 1998. As a result of that meeting, international donors pledged US$ 1.8 billion over the period 1998-2000 to support Nicaragua's programme to accelerate growth and reduce poverty within the context of a market economy.

3. At the Consultative Group meeting held in Washington, D.C., on 23 and 24 May 2000, the sound economic performance of Nicaragua during the biennium 1998-1999, with economic growth and decreasing inflation, was emphasized. There was a general agreement that combating poverty is the most important development goal for Nicaragua. The Government has been commended for the progress achieved in the preparation of a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy. President Arnoldo Alemán underlined the importance of governance as an indispensable precondition for confronting poverty and creating the structures for stable development. The international community stressed the importance of transparency in public spending, and urged the Nicaraguan authorities to apply the new instruments at their disposition in order to energetically resolve cases of corruption.

4. During the beginning of the second half of 1998, four central topics became prominent: first, the public confrontation between the Presidency and the Comptroller General's Office; second, the national dialogue between the Government and the political parties with parliamentary representation; third, the questioning of transparency in the administration of public resources; and fourth, the acute poverty, which could not be reduced by the economic strategy for development.

5. At the end of October 1998, hurricane Mitch swept through Central America, and the resulting floods and mudslides killed over 3,000 Nicaraguans and affected nearly 20 per cent of the nation's population. Hurricane Mitch encountered a divided country, with a successful macroeconomic programme with international backing and a critical situation of poverty of the most vulnerable sectors which were the most affected victims of the consequences of the hurricane. The fact that the issue of extreme poverty remained unresolved has determined the confidence in the Government.

6. The most important political event was the agreement achieved by the two main political parties, the Partido Liberal Constitucionalista (PLC) and Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN), around issues of constitutional reform. Among the more important new accords for reform are the automatic membership in parliament of former Presidents, which caused negative reactions in some political sectors, and the increased number of judges for the Supreme Court and the replacement of judges in the Supreme Electoral Council by the year 2000. The constitutional reforms were approved in January 2000. An additional element of the agreement became the new Electoral Law, criticized by international experts on the grounds that, without justifiable reasons, it makes political participation unduly difficult, with numerous requirements that appear to serve no purpose other than imposing a bipartisan model for Nicaragua.

7. In the current context, in addition to the ruling liberal party and FSLN, Nicaragua's political spectrum has only two other possible options: the Partido Conservador (PCN) and the Movimiento Democratico Nicaruguense (MDN). However, there is no clear indication of support for a third political option.

8. At the end of 1999 the conflict between the executive and the Comptroller General's Office culminated with the imprisonment and eventual liberation of the Comptroller for misuse of public funds. Some sectors interpreted the imprisonment as a

punishment of the Comptroller for his reports on corruption, for which no follow-up has been established by the rest of the state apparatus.

9. Only recently, the Nicaraguan Government requested technical assistance from the Organization of American States (OAS) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to facilitate a new national dialogue with the participation of the political parties and civil society organizations. Meetings are currently being held with all sectors for the purpose of exploring the convenience, contents and methodology of the dialogue.

III. Consolidation of democracy

A. Human rights

10. In June 1999, the National Assembly elected the Attorney for the Defense of Human Rights and his deputy. That election finally led to the installation of the Attorney's Office for the Defense of Human Rights, created by law in 1996 as an independent state institution. Upon governmental request, UNDP immediately initiated a project, with the support of the Nordic countries, to create the necessary conditions for its functioning, providing office space and equipment, communication facilities, technical assistance and managerial and organizational support. The project also includes the elaboration of a five-year strategic plan for the institutional development of the Attorney's Office, based on a financial strategy and a proposal for external cooperation. In November 1999, the Special Attorney for Children and Adolescents took up his post and the Special Attorney for Women has held public office since May 2000. In view of the achievements of that young institution, which is currently investigating about 60 cases of potential human rights violations, the Government significantly increased its financial support for the year 2000.

11. In relation to children's rights, the most significant change in governmental policy has been the approval by the National Assembly (May 1998) and coming into force (November 1998) of the Code for Children and Adolescents, which adapts the national legislation to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and culminates a process which began in 1996. While the Code has yet to demonstrate its impact on the situation of Nicaraguan children, the preparatory work for its approval, strongly supported by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), visibly increased the presence of the subject of children and adolescents rights on the Government's agenda, in the media and as an issue for debate among the public in general. The fact that the human and financial resources dedicated to the implementation of the Code are minimal led to the criticism that its provisions are too advanced for Nicaragua, especially in the area of juvenile justice, considered by some groups as too permissive, with youth in conflict with the law. Much will depend on effective advocacy to facilitate the allocation of state resources and donor contributions for the implementation of the Code by means of administrative reforms and training of personnel.

12. Considerable progress could be made in support of the child's right to a name and nationality. The inter-institutional efforts of the Supreme Electoral Council, the National Assembly, members of the Supreme Court, the Board of the National Election Council, the National Civil Registry, members of the Supreme Council of Private Enterprise and mayor's offices led to the creation of 17 windows for the registration of children in hospitals and registration campaigns. At the same time, the National Commission for the Promotion and Defense of the Rights of the Child presented and promoted the National Action Plan for Children and Adolescents (1999-2001).

13. The level of poverty and the perception of parents that poor children will not benefit from education encourage the practice of child labour. Nevertheless, the promotion of public sensitivity about the problem of child labour has seen some advancements, such as major support by the Ministry of Labour for the implementation of national legislation, prohibiting labour for children under 14 years of age. Advocacy by UNICEF for adequate budgetary allocations and technical assistance should contribute to the elaboration of legal regulations and to their implementation.

B. Solution of property conflicts

14. Between 1979 and 1990, a great number of properties were confiscated, expropriated or simply occupied by the Sandinist Government. In order to try to return those properties to their former owners or at least to compensate them, the previous Government

designed a scheme of institutions and procedures, which includes both the executive and judicial powers.

15. For several years, a comprehensive programme has assisted governmental efforts to resolve the property issue, with contributions from various bilateral and multilateral sources, including the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and UNDP. It focuses on streamlining administrative procedures and facilitating the revision and solution of property claims, and includes an extensive programme of urban titling. In view of the achievements of the programme, the Government of Sweden, UNDP and the Government of Nicaragua decided to support a second phase of the property programme, which started in August 1998. In December 1997, the administrative system had resolved 40 per cent of about 14,000 claims. By May 2000, the same system has successfully dealt with 60 per cent of almost 17,000 claims. In only 6 per cent of concluded property claims could real estate be given back to their former owners, whereas 75 per cent of the cases have been settled by way of compensation. This clearly shows that while much remains to be done, the problem of property conflicts has decreased significantly.

C. Strengthening of the rule of law

16. Governance, democratization and consolidation of the rule of law have been set as priorities by the Government. The need to reform the judicial system led to the formulation of a national programme for the modernization of justice, implemented by the Government with financial support from a wide range of Governments and organizations, principally the Governments of Sweden, the Netherlands, Spain, the United States of America, the European Union, IDB, the World Bank, UNDP, UNICEF and the Inter-American Institute for Human Rights. Under the umbrella of the programme, various initiatives are carried out, such as the modernization of laws and codes, the restructuring of the Supreme Court of Justice and the Attorney-General's Office, the installation of the Institute of Forensic Medicine, and the integrated reform of the penitentiary system.

17. At the beginning of May 2000, the National Assembly approved the Law for the Creation of the Public Ministry as the entity for opening criminal proceedings, an important step for avoiding conflicts of interests between the competencies of the Attorney General's Office. In December 1999, the Justice Commission of the National Assembly presented a project for a New Penal Code which has already been approved.

1. Modernization of forensic medicine

18. As a result of a project financed by the Government of Spain, with administrative and technical support by UNDP, the Institute of Forensic Medicine has been installed and put into operation in Managua. The Institute is a requirement for a modern criminal justice system, providing technical methods for examining bodies in cases of suspected criminal actions, as well as evaluating injuries of victims of violence. The project is currently in its second phase, focusing on the improvement of the technical capacity, infrastructure and equipment of the Institute.

2. Support to the security forces

19. The police forces in Nicaragua are undergoing a deep transformation into a small, well-organized and professional institution. The national police force has received considerable technical cooperation from various sources, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and UNDP. A UNDP/Spain Trust Fund provided specialized training of police officers and technical equipment for policemen engaged in the Managua Security Plan.

20. A new project, carried out by the national police and supported by UNDP/Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, was initiated at the end of 1999. It contributes to the elaboration of a comprehensive national strategy of the police force, with the purpose of developing the relationship between the police and the community under the principle of respect for human rights.

3. Prison reform

21. The administration of justice in the penal system evidences a profound crisis. Among the 5,500 detainees, one third are deprived of their individual freedom without a sentence. The poor financial situation of the national penitentiary system has a direct impact on such issues as health, infrastructure, rehabilitation and social reintegration. Some of the prisons are in a state of extreme deterioration, lacking

drinking water and minimum standards of security and sanitation.

22. An ambitious project for the integral reform of the penitentiary system in Nicaragua was launched by UNDP in 1998. The project, together with components financed by the Governments of Spain and Japan, encompasses assessments on the needs of the detainees, an integral reintegration programme, the integration of initiatives of civil society and state institutions, capacity-building and self-esteem programmes, and the improvement of infrastructure, existent equipment and living conditions in five penitentiary centres. It is carried out in close cooperation with other sectors of the penal justice programme, such as the Attorney General's Office, the Attorney's Office for the Defense of Human Rights, the Supreme Court of Justice, the National Assembly and the national police.

IV. Demobilization, reintegration and reconstruction of municipalities

A. Landmines

23. During the military confrontation between the Sandinist forces and the "Contras", it is estimated that 135,000 landmines were laid throughout the country. In 1993, the Government of Nicaragua requested the Organization of American States to launch an internationally financed mine action programme, with training, provision of equipment and supervision of mine clearance operations. Currently, the Nicaraguan mine action programme has approximately 600 people working across the country. Mine action efforts include, in addition to mine clearance, a pilot project for physical rehabilitation, assistance for mine victims and a public information and prevention campaign.

24. The United Nations has been also supportive of mine action in Nicaragua. Since 1998, UNICEF has been implementing a mine awareness project, entitled "Child-to-child prevention in Nicaragua" in cooperation with the Nicaragua Red Cross. As a result, more than 8,000 children, adolescents and adults in the most affected departments of the country have been provided with clear and simple information on the dangers of landmines and other explosive devices.

25. A particular obstacle to all demining and awareness-raising activities in Nicaragua was originated by hurricane Mitch: the mudslides and floods swept away and displaced mine fields that had previously been detected. As a consequence, lands that were mine-free before the storm must now be considered as suspected mine areas. Therefore, in early 1999 the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), with assistance from the UNDP Nicaragua Office, implemented a temporary mine-clearance assistance project to assist the efforts of the Government of Nicaragua in the re-establishment of normal circulation conditions in the areas affected by hurricane Mitch.

26. The Nicaraguan Government, which ratified the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction on 30 November 1998, reported that about 80,000 mines have yet to be destroyed, and has developed a plan to rid the country of the scourge of landmines by the year 2004.

27. Although OAS is the leading organization for mine action in the Americas, it has been agreed with UNMAS that both organizations should foster cooperation, particularly in the area of information exchange, technical support and lessons learned.

B. Productive reintegration of ex-combatants

28. In recent years, a range of projects for ex-combatants, comprising productive reintegration, capacity-building, construction of family habitats and legal support for the set-up of multiple service cooperatives, has been effectively supported by the Secretariat of Social Action, thereby benefiting more than 15,000 persons. Since November 1998, the Institute for Rural Development, with contributions from UNDP and the Government of France, has been implementing the second phase of a programme which provides assistance in the process of the consolidation of peace and the creation of a basis for productive and social development. The first stage of the project responded to the needs of more than 6,000 families of former combatants in over 40 municipalities.

C. Reintegration of Nicaraguans in exile

29. In the early 1990s, the Nicaraguan Government sought the support of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to create a programme to allow

Nicaraguan professionals to return and reintegrate fully into Nicaraguan society. The qualified Nicaraguan professionals return programme, which was supported by the European Union, ended in August 1999, having transferred 466 professionals and their dependants to Nicaragua, thereby reintegrating a total of more than 1,500 persons.

V. Natural disaster prevention and management

30. The consequences of hurricane Mitch, which hit Central America on 26 October 1998, led to the worst economic, social and ecological losses in Nicaraguan history. Hurricane Mitch affected over 800,000 people, killing more than 3,000 and leaving more than 400,000 people displaced. The storms and floods swept crops away and destroyed bridges and roads, schools and housing, power and water supplies. The Government calculated that total destruction amounted to some US$1.5 billion, almost 65 per cent of the gross domestic product. Nicaragua's growth has been reduced in 1998 from a projected 6.5 per cent to 4 per cent. It is estimated that it could take at least several years of reconstruction to attain the levels of development that existed prior to the catastrophe.

31. Hurricane Mitch also exposed the consequences of past development policies that have produced deep poverty, extreme inequalities in income and access to vital resources, such as land, and intensifying environmental deterioration, creating ever more marginalized and vulnerable communities. Nicaragua was the poorest country in Central America even before the hurricane devastated the region. The levels of poverty translated into chronic problems in health and education, and the high problems of debt servicing, which absorbed over half of government revenue in 1997, constrained the Government's ability to address human development needs.

32. The Government, both in the capital and in municipalities throughout the country, responded to the effects of the hurricane and worked with civil society organizations, who constituted the bulk of the emergency effort. Their efforts have been supplemented by widespread international support, both for emergency and longer-term aid, as well as for some urgent debt relief.

33. From the beginning of the emergency, the work of the United Nations system has focused on addressing the basic needs of the population in terms of shelter, health, infrastructure and food security. The United Nations resident coordinator coordinated the United Nations system's response through the United Nations disaster management team (heads of UNDP, the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)), in close collaboration with the Government's national emergency committee, local emergency committees, the Secretariat of External Cooperation and the Civil Defense authorities. The United Nations resident coordinator and the disaster management team were supported by a team of United Nations disaster management experts mobilized by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for the assessment of emergency needs, the management of disaster-related information and the coordination of international response activities.

34. Several meetings were held with the donor community to coordinate assistance. The resident coordinator also promoted a coordination meeting with the national and international NGO community, and established a permanent working group of emergency focal points of the agencies of the United Nations disaster management team to strengthen coordination mechanisms during the emergency.

35. Under the coordination of an inter-agency working group, the United Nations resident coordinator and the United Nations disaster management team prepared a United Nations inter-agency transitional appeal for relief and immediate rehabilitation, to cover needs in the country during the period December 1998-May 1999. Altogether, the United Nations system in Nicaragua invested about US$ 30 million.

36. A joint (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, WHO/Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO), UNICEF, UNDP) disaster response and recovery mission was undertaken in areas of Nicaragua (and also in Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras) affected by hurricane Mitch to assess the United Nations system coordination and make recommendations for improved disaster preparedness. Its report was presented at an international meeting held in Santo Domingo in February 1999, and a progress report on actions taken followed in December 1999.

37. UNDP sent focal points to the main affected areas soon after the hurricane passed in order to assist the local authorities in the management of immediate relief activities, gathering of information, monitoring and supervising UNDP assistance at local level. They provided the Managua office with the latest information on the situation and coordinated efforts at local level with the institutions involved. In December 1998, UNDP launched an ambitious rehabilitation project in 25 municipalities in the northern part of the country. With contributions from UNFPA, UNICEF and the Government of Finland, the project offered survivors an integral solution for a sustainable livelihood as well as training and access to resources for productive activities. The confluence of different actors in the same geographical areas facilitated a number of innovative partnerships with bilateral donors and national and international NGOs, ranging from the Red Cross to religious organizations. UNDP promoted and led this "associative chain" through sound technical support and extensive coordination activities. Some institutions channelled resources through UNDP, while in other cases independent but complementary actions were achieved.

38. In December 1998, the Paris Club met to agree a suspension of debt-service payments for Nicaragua, and this meeting was immediately followed by a donor Consultative Group meeting in Washington, D.C., which also agreed to support multilateral debt payments via a trust fund. Donors committed their support to Nicaragua and other affected Central American countries. It was further agreed at this meeting that Governments affected by hurricane Mitch would consult with civil society and develop proposals for reconstruction to be discussed in a second Consultative Group meeting in Stockholm in May 1999.

39. The following year began with the preparation and the general expectations around the Consultative Group meeting for the reconstruction and transformation of Central America in Stockholm from 25 to 28 May 1999. The formulation of the documents presented by the Nicaraguan Government in the meeting included important steps of consultation with civil society and all other important sectors. The principal opposition party, FSLN, did not participate in the process. The United Nations system in Nicaragua contributed to the preparations of the Stockholm meeting, facilitating and financing a donor forum for the strategic vision and ensuring the participation of civil society representatives in the Consultative Group. As an important mediator of the Government, the United Nations system supported the improvement of its documents through the incorporation of cross-cutting themes, such as population and social and ecological vulnerability.

40. In the Consultative Group meeting, Nicaragua presented a five-year plan, defining needs of US$ 2.5 billion, US$ 1.3 billion being of main concern. This plan focused on four main areas: the social sectors, infrastructure, rural development and governance. The international community praised the plan for national transformation, sustaining the importance of a vision of transformation for the country, and agreed with the priorities of the plan, including decentralization, disaster prevention, transparency, institutional strengthening (Supreme Electoral Council, National Assembly, Justice Supreme Court, Comptroller General's Office) and anti-poverty policies. At the same time, the donors questioned various aspects of the proposal's political credibility and mechanisms of implementation.

41. In the post-emergency phase, the United Nations system is contributing to the prevention and management of natural disasters and improvements in the area of migration, population distribution, environment, human rights, basic education and the recovery of basic agricultural production and human settlements with a productive focus. Horizontal cooperation has been promoted through a strategy based on social and gender equity, governance and decentralization.

42. As a joint initiative of WFP and FAO, the regional Operation for Help and Recuperation initiated its activities in July 1999 in Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala. The Operation is designed for two years and concentrates on families and vulnerable groups which lost their belongings or principal source of income. The objective is to provide assistance to more than one million persons. Under the food-for-work scheme, the beneficiaries carry out activities for the rehabilitation of their economic and social infrastructure and for soil conservation and forest activities.

43. Although Nicaragua is frequently affected by natural disasters, the country lacks a permanent disaster prevention and handling system, and has repeatedly

reacted through ad hoc organizations implemented in post-emergency situations. After the catastrophe caused by hurricane Mitch clearly demonstrated the nation's extreme level of vulnerability, the Government of Nicaragua understood that the only course for confronting that reality is the definition of a national strategy to organize intersectoral coordination structures that allow coherent actions. As a result, the Government, through the Vice Presidency of the Republic, requested UNDP for special technical assistance to create a disaster prevention and management system. After a long series of public forums and meetings, both civil society and governmental actors defined a national policy, which is supported by the creation of a national disaster prevention, mitigation and response system. A technical team, supported by UNDP, helped draft the corresponding framework law (Law 337), signed by the President of the Republic in April 2000. With the passing of that modern, decentralized, participatory and realistic law, Nicaragua became the first Central American nation to move towards an integrated disaster prevention and response system, and the third in Latin America after Colombia and Mexico.

VI. Decentralization and local development

44. As an element of the post-structural adjustment reforms and the process of modernization and reform of the state, decentralization is a topic of significant relevance both nationally and for the donors' policy dialogue with Government. Yet progress in the process of decentralization is rather slow. Current governmental efforts focus on investments in infrastructure and poverty eradication to prepare local governments for future autonomy.

45. A group of donors channelling aid for local level development have expressed concern about the lack of a decentralization policy by the Government despite the reinvigoration of the Sectoral Commission on Decentralization, a specialized advisory body of the central Government comprising several sectoral ministries, the Nicaraguan Institute for the Advancement of Municipalities, (INIFOM), the Nicaraguan Company for Aqueducts and Sewer Systems and a delegate from the Presidency. While the Commission on Decentralization has provided some leadership, it is in effect a subsidiary policy coordination body, ultimately reporting to the Vice-President and not to the Presidency, which by regulation has purview over relations between the central and municipal governments. INIFOM, which is legally mandated to coordinate decentralization activities, has limited its actions to channelling donor and central government funding and assorted capacity-building activities to the municipal level. This institutional predicament has given way to fragmented initiatives of deconcentration, administrative decentralization or delegation that, while more efficient, may run counter to the critical goal of devolution of powers to municipalities.

46. As a result of macro-stabilization policies, the financial situation of municipalities has deteriorated to a point where services to citizens have been sharply reduced. The issuance of several legal instruments under the two preceding Governments and their subsequent revisions based on initial implementation experience did not succeed in laying the ground for a comprehensive policy framework, and there is little evidence of political continuity towards a much-needed policy on decentralization.

47. On the other hand, there is some evidence that the Government is willing to intensify its efforts to develop a policy framework that would allow it to formulate comprehensive and decisive policy. In early 1999, departmental secretariats of the Government were established as deconcentrated administrative entities with the purpose of coordinating and supervising governmental activities over the whole country. They also serve as a link between municipal demands and the plans of the central Government but are not backed by civil society. In 2000, municipalities for the first time received a share of 1 per cent of the Nicaraguan general budget, in response to mayors' demands.

48. In the context of the promotion of school autonomy, the Ministry for Education, Culture and Sports is expanding school coverage by way of community participation in the pre-school, primary and secondary school education. The Ministry of Health has achieved the administrative decentralization of its functions due to the establishment of local integral health-care systems. Technical support by the implementing agencies (WHO/PAHO and UNICEF) for this project has been crucial for its success. Improvements of institutional capacity and indicators of the six systems, assisted by the project, laid the ground for the design of a new phase (2000-2004),

which will gradually transfer administrative responsibilities from the agencies to the Health Ministry. In accordance with the law, the Ministry for Transport and Infrastructure transferred the control, regulation and administration of transport to all municipalities. That measure had very negative effects, mainly due to a lack of capacities and financial resources at the municipal level. With regard to decentralization in the area of environmental management, the Ministry for Environment and Natural Resources, in collaboration with the municipalities, has created municipal and territorial commissions for environment, which are already functioning in about 40 municipalities.

49. An integrated basic services programme has been carried out by UNICEF in 30 municipalities heavily affected by the war. Activities of the programme include institution-strengthening, child rights, health, education, women's participation, and water supply and sanitation, thereby complementing considerable efforts of governmental entities, such as the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. Due to hurricane Mitch, which affected all the programme's municipalities, special emphasis was given to rehabilitation of health and education infrastructure damaged by the hurricane. The organizational location of important programme components within the Secretariat of Social Action exposed it to political influence, which affected interventions. Also, increasing centralization in decision-making by the Secretariat limited the participation of communities and municipalities, while lack of an overall governmental policy for decentralization has become a serious constraint to a project aiming at decentralized institutional development at the local level. In agreement with the donor, it was decided to put on hold all activities before the last quarter of 1999.

50. Based on capacity-building programmes funded by UNDP, which have been put into operation in more than 100 municipalities, the Government is implementing a pilot project in 21 municipalities for the career in municipal administration. The project has been designed by INIFOM, which is promoting the approval of a law for careers in municipal administration and the civil service. The preparation of the proposal is based on practical experiences and a favourable legal background, both constitutional and through the Law of Municipalities. The National Assembly is currently considering the draft of the law, and its approval and regulation is expected before the end of 2000.

51. A major part of projects and programmes, supported by the international community, has its focus not directly on decentralization but on enhancing the technical and administrative capacities at the municipal level and strengthening community participation in the identification and prioritization of projects. The PROTIERRA project of the World Bank, carried out by INIFOM in 32 municipalities of the country, contributed to modernize an outdated system of tax collection, leading to considerable increments in municipal revenues. The mayor's offices of the participating municipalities improved their services of drinking water, road improvement, street lighting, construction of bridges and sewer systems and garbage collection. The project emphasizes the responsibilities of the population for the development of their communities. Similar projects are carried out directly by mayors' offices, with support from the Governments of Denmark, the Netherlands and Spain.

52. The assistance of UNDP and the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) through a project entitled "System of municipal land registry" has contributed to the establishment and strengthening of a land registry system to levy taxes for land and property real estate at the level of municipal mayors offices. The project is currently in its third stage, and has facilitated an increase in tax revenues and fiscal autonomy. A major consequence of the setting-up of the land registry system has been the creation of the National Land Registry Commission and the organization of several forums for discussion between different institutions. An innovative project supported by UNDP and executed by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) and INIFOM, which contributes to the integral development of human settlements, has been recently initiated. It aims at strengthening local administrative capacities, community organization and the reduction of housing deficits.

53. The Social Emergency Fund is in charge of the execution of a project of participative planning in 43 municipalities and the decentralization of the administration of project cycles in nine municipalities. In the latter case, the Fund transfers the entire control of identification, selection and supervision of social infrastructure projects to the local governments. By

means of local participative planning, FISE facilitated the identification of small-scale projects, with high community participation at a low cost.

54. A special feature of the Nicaraguan decentralization process has been the strong support by civil society, which stresses the need to define a comprehensive model of decentralization in contrast to the existing "de facto decentralization", a result of responding individually to the requirements of the different levels of administration. Recent studies underline the fact that a comprehensive and integral policy of decentralization is not realistic in the short run.

VII. Population, women's rights, and sexual and reproductive health

55. The cooperation of UNFPA with the Nicaraguan Government during the period 1998-2000 has contributed to important changes in the consideration of population issues in public policies. The Government approved a national policy on population and is in the process of elaborating its action plan under the coordination of the national population commission. This vision of the crucial importance of population factors for sustainable development has been incorporated in the strategies presented in the Consultative Group meetings held in Geneva, Stockholm and Washington, D.C., where the Nicaraguan Government recognized that rapid population increase exerts great additional pressure on the capacity to provide basic social services and diminishes the effects of economic growth on poverty reduction. With support from civil society organizations, especially those related to the defence of women's rights and reproductive health, the country has achieved substantial progress towards the objectives of the International Conference for Population and Development and has a clearer perception of the strategic importance to train human resources in issues of population, rights and sexual and reproductive health.

56. The programme promoted a decentralized focus through the Association of Municipalities and community organizations, contributing to the strengthening of local authorities and support for the production and utilization of sociodemographic information. With assistance from UNFPA and the United States Agency for International Development, the Health Ministry has been supplied with a large stock of contraceptive devices for the next years.

57. At the end of 1999, the estimated number of people affected by human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) in Nicaragua was 476, with an increase of 5 per cent from 1998 (UNFPA mid-term review report of June 2000). Projections by the Health Minister admit that actual figures might be much higher. In 1999, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) supported the Government in the preparation of the national AIDS plan, in the monitoring of activities for the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs/HIV/AIDS) implemented with the army and the police, and information activities for teacher training schools. The same year saw the expansion of the UNAIDS group, including such partners as the education and health ministries, the health committee of the National Assembly, the Nicaraguan Institute for Women, the Nicaraguan Human Rights Centre, the National AIDS Commission and NGOs. The United Nations system's theme group on AIDS includes technical staff from each agency and national counterparts. A PAHO/WHO project with bilateral funding makes PAHO/WHO the leading agency on HIV/AIDS in the country.

VIII. Environmental management

58. In Nicaragua, agricultural and forestry practices are the principal reason for the accelerated loss of natural forest coverage and biodiversity, shortages of surface and groundwater, and the severe erosion of soils. In October 1998, hurricane Mitch wreaked unprecedented agricultural and ecological destruction upon Nicaragua's western Pacific and central regions. The disaster was made worse by intense deforestation, soil erosion and unsustainable farming practices.

59. In recent years, several diagnostic studies (including poverty and environmental assessments) have been undertaken by governmental agencies, private institutions and development cooperation agencies. As a result of those efforts, various strategies have been proposed to reduce the environmental degradation and promote ecological restoration as a means of mitigating poverty and fostering sustainable development. The national council for sustainable development has published a proposal titled

"environmental plan of action for the transformation and reconstruction of Nicaragua" (March 1999), which provides guidelines and concrete actions for environmental regeneration and vulnerability reduction.

60. International cooperation in the environmental field currently comes from many different sources, both bilateral (Austria, Germany, Canada, Denmark, United States, Finland, Holland, Norway and Sweden) and multilateral (Inter-American Development Bank, World Bank, Central American Bank for Economic Integration, UNDP, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and Global Environment Facility (GEF)).

61. To date, Nicaragua does not have a law that protects its biological resources. But since the beginning of 2000, the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources has launched a project for the elaboration of a national biodiversity strategy and action plan. The project is supported by UNDP and GEF. Since 1998, UNDP has established a number of projects, including the capacity 21 programme, furthering the consolidation of the national sustainable development council; a Green municipalities project, which will contribute to environmental management and sustainable development at the local level; the elaboration of a national report and action plan to combat desertification and drought; a climate change project; which creates a national inventory for emissions of gases with greenhouse effects; a study on the potential impact of climate change in Nicaragua; and a national action plan to confront climate change and its adverse effects.

62. A regional UNDP/UNEP project for the establishment of a programme for the consolidation of the Mesoamerican biological corridor was initiated in April 2000. The corridor is a priority of the Central American Alliance for Sustainable Development, and will consist of a network of protected areas and their buffer zones, linked by biological corridors. It constitutes a central development concept for the subregion, integrating conservation and the sustainable use of biodiversity within the framework of sustainable economic development.

United Nations E/2000/92

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
13 July 2000
English
Original: Spanish

Substantive session of 2000
New York, 5 July-1 August 2000
Agenda item 1
Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters

Letter dated 11 July 2000 from the Permanent Representative of Mexico to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to inform you that the Government of Mexico has decided to apply for membership of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

The Government of Mexico has an open policy of offering asylum and refuge to those who have had to leave their countries of origin for various reasons. This is borne out by the thousands of refugees who, in the modern history of my country, have been accepted by Mexico and who undoubtedly have enriched its educational, cultural and social life.

Recently, the end of the Guatemalan refugee programme in Mexico provided a tangible illustration of the policy of protecting refugees and seeking durable, humanitarian and comprehensive solutions. The so-called "Mexican solution" consisted of a dual approach of promoting the voluntary return of refugees when circumstances so permitted, while providing for the local integration of those who decided to stay in Mexico and those who acquired Mexican nationality.

In view of its accession, in June 2000, to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol thereto, Mexico reiterates its commitment to cooperating in the protection and assistance of refugees, in accordance with the provisions of the above-mentioned international instruments and with the principles of non-return and maintenance of family unity.

For these reasons, I am informing you of Mexico's interest in becoming a member of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, with the conviction that my country will make a positive contribution to the search for new and innovative solutions to the problem of refugees.

00-53203 (E) 170700 170700

To this end, I have the honour to request that this note be circulated, on an urgent basis, as a document of the Economic and Social Council, so that it may be considered by the Council members at the current substantive session of 2000.

(*Signed*) Manuel **Tello**
Permanent Representative of Mexico
to the United Nations